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Cuban Ransom By Roscoe Drummond

Why It Had to Be Paid

WILL THE RELEASE to freedom of the 1113 brave anti-Castro Cuban rebels — the Bay of Pigs invasion prisoners who

made it only to Havana's jails—bring a sigh of relief from the American people or a sense of shame that the United States got itself trapped in international extortion?



Drummond

There is room for honest differences of opinion. One California pharmaceutical firm honorably declined to contribute medical instruments on the ground that it would be paying "Castro blackmail." There is no doubt that the Federal Government has given active, official aid to private efforts to raise \$53 million worth of medicine and food.

The fund-raising and negotiations to release the Cuban prisoners have not been a wholly spontaneous private enterprise. It has had official encouragement, guidance, and financial assistance. This means that the United States Government is a partner in this ransom. And I think rightly.

IT IS RIGHT for three reasons:

1. It is an act of necessity. It is the only way the Government of the United States could discharge its responsibility to these Cuban freedom fighters. They chose to risk their lives for the freedom of the country but we are also responsible for their plight. We helped to plan

and carry out the fumbled Bay of Pigs invasion. We now know that military support which had been committed to it in advance was cut back after the invasion began. For that reason we share additional blame for what happened. In his recent television interview President Kennedy referred to "the Cuban disaster of 1961," and added: "I was responsible." The fate of these prisoners has long been on the conscience of the President and, I feel, on the conscience of many Americans.

2. It is an act of mercy. The lives of these prisoners are more precious and more important than any benefit which will accrue to the Castro regime from the medical supplies and food given in exchange.

3. It yields the minimum assistance to Castro. The medical supplies and food will not boost the long-term economy, they contribute primarily to the human welfare of some of the Cuban people.

I would be the first to agree that there are disagreeable circumstances attending this transaction. But the cold war and the effort of the Communists to suffocate human freedom by force creates a disagreeable world in which we must occasionally choose the lesser of two evils.

It seems to me that the lesser of two evils—whether to allow them to linger in jail or be shot or to pay the blackmail even with official assistance—is the ransom.

Apart from this humane and obligatory action, surely nothing should be done by the United States to

maintain Castro's repressive dictatorship over the Cuban people. In a recent interview in New York a Turkish newspaper correspondent, who had spent several weeks in Cuba, confirmed the judgment of others that today the Cuban people are overwhelmingly—he put it at 90 per cent—hostile to the regime. They would like nothing better than to get rid of it, lock, stock, and sickle.

But all the instruments of power, terror, and coercion are in the hands of Castro and the Russians. A civilian uprising is utterly impossible as long as the Kremlin is prepared to pay the bill of supporting the Cuban economy with massive economic aid.

This is why the widest possible quarantine on trade with Castro's Cuba is vital. It increases the already heavy economic burden which Moscow has to bear to keep its satellite afloat. Our central objective must be to make that burden as great as possible in the hope that, as it mounts, Khrushchev will decide that it is an unfruitful enterprise pouring Soviet resources down a rat hole.

Many Americans would, I am sure, like to see President Kennedy publicly confirm that the conditional pledge not to invade Cuba is no longer applicable because Khrushchev failed to make good on his promise of inspection. I am not advocating invasion; I am advocating uncertainty as to what we might do. The more uncertainty Castro has hanging over him, the better.

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